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For further information about this booklet contact Charles Hobbs, editor, News Division, Office of Public Affairs, Room 406-A, U.S Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250 or call (202) 720-4026.

News Releases-

Release No. 0234.94

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FIELD TESTS APPROVED FOR BIOCONTROL OF YELLOW FEVER MOSQUITO

WASHINGTON, March 21--A microscopic organism that attacks mosquitoes spreading yellow fever has been approved by state and federal regulatory agencies for small-scale field tests in Florida this spring and summer, U.S. Department of Agriculture scientists said.

In lab studies, once this beneficial organism infects the mosquito *Aedes aegypti*, it hitches a ride in the insect's eggs and is spread to succeeding generations. "We need the field tests to confirm the organism's potential use as a new mosquito control agent," the scientists said.

Approval from the Florida Department of Agriculture and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency clears the way for what would be the first outdoor tests in the United States of a foreign microorganism to control *A. aegypti*. This mosquito breeds in water-catching places such as abandoned tires and is found throughout the southeastern states.

Donald R. Barnard and James J. Becnel of USDA's Agricultural Research Service in Gainesville, Fla., said the biocontrol agent, *Edhazardia aedis*, is a protozoan-like organism called a microsporidium. The organism infects the aquatic stages of *A. aegypti* mosquitoes with tiny spores that are spread to the next generation through the eggs and eventually weaken or kill the insect. Those mosquitoes that do survive spread the microsporidium to the next generation.

"It is specific to mosquitoes and, in lab tests, *E. aedis* has had no long-term adverse effects on animals or beneficial insects such as honey bees," said Becnel, an entomologist based at the agency's Medical and Veterinary Entomology Research Lab in Gainesville.

Originally found in Puerto Rico in 1930, it was rediscovered in Thailand in 1979 and brought to the agency's Gainesville laboratory for study in 1985. Becnel has been studying the organism inside the lab since the late 1980s. He, Barnard and cooperators said the field studies at the lab and other Florida sites, in cooperation with Florida mosquito control authorities, are necessary to confirm preliminary lab findings.

An *A. aegypti* mosquito transmits diseases such as yellow fever and dengue when it sucks blood from an infected person, takes the disease virus into its body, and infects a healthy person when it takes another blood meal. These viral diseases are not currently found in the United States, but have increased in other parts of the world and have the potential to spread in this country because of the presence of the yellow fever mosquito, the researchers said.

Dengue is found in Asia, Africa, the Caribbean Basin, South America and other parts of the world. It increased 26 percent in Puerto Rico between 1990-91, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Yellow fever cases increased in 1990 to the highest levels since 1948, according to the World Health Organization.

"The concern is that *A. aegypti* is now found in the Southeastern United States and has the potential for spreading these diseases if people who are infected come into this country," Barnard said. "We want to suppress the mosquitoes so we can minimize the chance that the disease could spread."

A. aegypti is most prevalent in urban areas, breeding in trash-littered areas and even in rain-filled bird feeders and clogged gutters. The best way to control the mosquitoes, Becnel said, is to remove whatever collects water where females lay their eggs.

"But often this isn't practical," he said. "And insecticides have not been effective against the yellow fever mosquito because of resistance and because the mosquitoes are sheltered in containers and go into homes and other buildings where insecticides don't reach them."

In the field studies, the scientists will fill golf cart tires with water, mosquito eggs and the microsporidium. Becnel said they will measure the spread and persistence of the microsporidium through *A. aegypti* populations and determine the best way under field conditions to inoculate mosquitoes with the organism, such as by spraying or other methods.

"We need this kind of information if we're going to work with the private sector to develop this for use by commercial mosquito control agencies," Becnel said. "We'll probably need at least a few years of field studies before a commercial product could be developed."

A key advantage of *E. aedis*, Becnel said, is that in lab studies the female spreads the biocontrol organism through her eggs to her offspring. "That means that each generation should infect the next *A. aegypti* generation with the disease," Becnel said.

That spread from one generation to the next has only been confirmed with the yellow fever mosquito, Becnel said. "In lab tests, *E. aedis* infected six other mosquito species, but they are what we call 'dead end hosts,' because the infection stops with one generation," he said.

One of those mosquitoes is a beneficial species called *Toxorhynchites rutilus rutilus*, whose larvae feed on *A. aegypti* and other container-breeding mosquitoes. But Becnel said the beneficial mosquito females don't spread the microsporidium to their offspring, so the impact on the beneficial mosquito should not be as great.

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Release No. 0235.94
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USDA AMENDS THE RULES FOR JAPANESE UNSHU ORANGE IMPORTATIONS

WASHINGTON, March 21--The U.S. Department of Agriculture will allow the importation of Unshu oranges into certain states that are not commercial citrus-producing states.

Japanese Unshu oranges can be shipped to or through an expanded area including Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina and South Carolina.

"These States will not be threatened by the possibility of infection with citrus canker from the Unshu oranges," said B. Glen Lee, deputy administrator for plant protection and quarantine in USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

U.S. and Japanese plant protection agencies work closely to ensure that trees and oranges are free from canker, and that the surfaces of oranges are sterilized before export.

"We believe these existing safeguards are adequate to ensure that the Unshu oranges would not spread citrus canker into the additional states," Lee said.

The regulation was announced as a final rule in today's Federal Register for March 21.

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Release No. 0236.94
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USDA AMENDS COMPOSITION OF DAIRY BOARD

WASHINGTON, March 21 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today that it is amending the composition of the National Dairy Promotion and Research Board.

Patricia Jensen, acting assistant secretary of agriculture for marketing and inspection services, said the amendment shifts a board seat to Region 4 (Arkansas, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas) from Region 8 (Alabama, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee).

The 36-member board of dairy farmers requested the shift to reflect changes in milk production. By law, board representation must reflect national milk production patterns.

The National Dairy Promotion and Research Board was established under the Dairy and Tobacco Adjustment Act of 1983 to develop and administer a coordinated program of promotion, research and nutrition education. The board is appointed by the secretary of agriculture and designs programs to strengthen the dairy industry's position in domestic and foreign markets.

The program is financed by a mandatory 15-cent-per-hundredweight assessment on all milk marketed commercially by dairy producers in the contiguous 48 states.

The final rule amending the composition of the board is scheduled to appear in the March 22 Federal Register and becomes effective on May 1, 1994.



Release No. 0237.94

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USDA PROPOSES AMENDMENTS TO EGG RESEARCH AND PROMOTION ORDER

WASHINGTON, March 21 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture is proposing amendments to the Egg Research and Promotion Order that would exempt more small-scale egg producers from assessment and provide for research project funding.

Lon Hatamiya, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said the proposed amendments would exempt producers owning 75,000 or fewer laying hens. The current exemption is 30,000 or fewer laying hens. The amendments would also require that future funding for research projects be allocated at an amount comparable to the proportion allocated in fiscal year 1993.

The proposal would implement a recent congressional amendment to the 1974 Egg Research and Consumer Information Act, which authorizes the Egg Research and Promotion Order.

Hatamiya said that USDA's proposal, if adopted, would have little effect on operations of the American Egg Board, which conducts research and promotion programs authorized by the act. Although about 41 percent of egg producers would be affected by the proposal, their assessments represent only 4 percent of the total assessments collected to support work of the board.

Details of the proposed amendments are scheduled to appear as a proposed rule in the March 22 Federal Register. Comments should be sent to Janice L. Lockard, Chief, Standardization Branch, Poultry Division, AMS, USDA, Room 3944-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456, on or before May 23. Copies of the rule and additional information are available at that address; tel. (202) 720-7065, FAX (202) 690-3165.



Release No.0238.94

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INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH TARGETS BOVINE TUBERCULOSIS

WASHINGTON, March 22--An international effort is underway to find better diagnostic tools against bovine tuberculosis to help eradicate the number one infectious disease of cattle.

"We're taking a three-pronged approach," said microbiologist Diana L. Whipple of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service. "We will evaluate the effectiveness of current diagnostic tests, develop improved tests and also identify various strains of the bacteria that cause the disease."

Whipple is leading bovine tuberculosis studies at the agency's National Animal Disease Center at Ames, Iowa, as part of a cooperative effort against bovine tuberculosis by USDA, the Mexican government and the U.S. cattle industry. Outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis have occurred recently in both the United States and Mexico.

"Current diagnostic tests identify only 80 percent of infected animals," said Whipple. She has already evaluated a blood test that could replace the TB skin test, the official test for bovine tuberculosis.

"But we're still not identifying all infected animals with the skin test or the blood test," she continued. "A more accurate test may be a combination of tests."

Bovine tuberculosis is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis*. The disease spreads when coughing releases the bacteria into the air, where they can be inhaled by uninfected animals. Human tuberculosis is caused by a different bacterium, *M. tuberculosis*, but the *M. bovis* organism can infect humans. Pasteurizing milk protects against human infection caused by *M. bovis*.

"For public health and trade reasons, we want to completely eradicate this disease," said Whipple.

Whipple said recent outbreaks of bovine tuberculosis in the U.S. are due largely to three sources of reinfection: imported Mexican steers, low levels of infection in large dairies and increasing numbers of captive elk and deer.

In 1993, 1.2 million Mexican steers were imported. Among those imported steers found to be infected, 65 percent are of the Holstein breed, Whipple noted. Mexico has put a voluntary ban on exporting Holsteins to the United States. But concern remains about Mexican steers already in feedlots in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas.

Large U.S. dairies with thousands of animals are difficult to monitor for tuberculosis, Whipple said. Even though these herds are quarantined and tested by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, low levels of tuberculosis infection persist. Whipple said more reliable diagnostic tests and the ability to identify sources of reinfection could help overcome this problem.

Many deer are being raised privately or commercially in the United States for venison. Elk are in captivity on game ranches and in private zoos. Whipple hopes to determine if the organism that causes tuberculosis in elk is the same one causing TB in Mexican steers.

Whipple serves on an industry-agency tuberculosis working group that also includes representatives of APHIS, the National Cattlemen's Association, the National Milk Producers Federation, the North American Deer Association, the North American Elk Association, the U.S. Animal Health Association, state veterinarians, the American Farm Bureau and the Livestock Conservation Institute.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For details, contact Diana L. Whipple, microbiologist, National Animal Disease Center, Agricultural Research Service, USDA, Ames, Iowa 50010. Telephone: (515) 239-8377.

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Release No. 0240.94
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USDA PROTECTS 10 NEW PLANT VARIETIES

WASHINGTON, March 22 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued certificates of protection to developers of 10 new varieties of seed-reproduced plants including Kentucky bluegrass, cotton, tall fescue, pumpkin, soybean, wheat and durum wheat.

Kenneth H. Evans, commissioner for plant variety protection with USDA's Agriculture Marketing Service, said developers of the new varieties will have the exclusive right to reproduce, sell, import and export their products in the United States for 18 years. Certificates of protection are granted after a review of the breeders' records and claims that each new variety is novel, uniform and stable.

The following varieties have been issued certificates of protection:

- the Bartitia variety of Kentucky bluegrass, developed by Barenbrug Holding, Tangent, Ore.;
- the DP 5816, DP 5461 and DP 5614 varieties of cotton, developed by the Delta & Pine Land Co., Scott, Miss.;

- the Emperor variety of tall fescue, developed by Pickseed West Inc., Tangent, Ore.;
- the Lumina variety of pumpkin, developed by the Hollar Seed Co., Colusa, Calif.;
- the Chapman variety of soybean, developed by the Ohio Agricultural Research & Development Center, The Ohio State University, Wooster, Ohio;
- the 9521 variety of soybean, developed by Pioneer Hi-Bred International Inc., Johnston, Iowa;
- the Minnpro variety of wheat, developed by the Minnesota Agricultural Experiment Station, St. Paul, Minn.; and
- the Bravadur variety of durum wheat, developed by the Farmers Marketing Corp., Phoenix, Ariz.

The certificates of protection for the Chapman soybean variety, the Minnpro wheat variety and the Bravadur durum wheat variety are being issued for sale by variety name only as a class of certified seed and to conform to the number of generations specified by the owner.

The Agricultural Marketing Service administers the plant variety protection program which provides marketing protection to developers of new and distinctive seed-reproduced plants ranging from farm crops to flowers.



Release No. 0241.94
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USDA PROTECTS EIGHT NEW PLANT VARIETIES AND REISSUES ONE CERTIFICATE

WASHINGTON, March 22 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued certificates of protection to developers of eight new varieties of seed-reproduced plants including bean, lettuce, pea, pepper, annual ryegrass, soybean and wheat. In addition, one certificate is being reissued at this time.

Kenneth H. Evans, commissioner for plant variety protection with USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said developers of the new varieties will have the exclusive right to reproduce, sell, import and export their products in the United States for 18 years. Certificates of protection are granted after a review of the breeders' records and claims that each new variety is novel, uniform and stable.

The following varieties have been issued certificates of protection:

- the Marquis variety of bean, developed by the Rogers NK Seed Co., Boise, Idaho;
- the Bonanza variety of lettuce, developed by the Asgrow Seed Co., Kalamazoo, Mich.;
- the HP758A variety of pea, developed by the Rogers NK Seed Co., Boise, Idaho;
- the Red Savina variety of pepper, developed by Frank Garcia Jr., Walnut, Calif.;
- the Jackson variety of annual ryegrass, developed by the Mississippi Agricultural and Forestry Experiment Station, Mississippi State, Miss.;
- the TAM 90 variety of annual ryegrass, developed by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, College Station, Texas;
- the BT 2877 variety of soybean, developed by Ziller Seed Co., Inc., Bird Island, Minn.; and
- the Mac-1 variety of wheat, developed by Plant Breeders 1 Inc., Moscow, Idaho.

A certificate of protection for the Alfagraze alfalfa variety, owned by the University of Georgia Research Foundation Inc., is being reissued at this time.

The certificate of protection for the Mac-1 wheat variety is being issued for sale by variety name only as a class of certified seed and to conform to the number of generations specified by the owner.

The Agricultural Marketing Service administers the plant variety protection program which provides marketing protection to developers of new and distinctive seed-reproduced plants ranging from farm crops to flowers.



Release No. 0243.94
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PLANT IGNORES NATURE'S "SLOWDOWN" ORDER, KEEPS GROWING

WASHINGTON, March 23--A new variety of cicer milkvetch--a range and pasture plant for livestock--produces forage longer than usual because it shrugs off Nature's command to slow down as summer days get shorter, said a U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist.

Windsor--the new variety's name--is well adapted to Colorado and Wyoming, said Charley E. Townsend at the Agricultural Research Service. Additional testing by ARS or other scientists at nearly 20 locations will determine its potential in the midwest and other U.S. areas along with western Canada, western Europe and New Zealand.

"Windsor produces as much forage as alfalfa under proper management--and about 15 to 20 percent more forage than Monarch, the most productive cicer milkvetch variety in the U.S. We got the yield boost by breeding plants that ignore a natural tendency to slow growth in mid- to late summer," said Townsend, a plant geneticist at ARS' Crops Research Laboratory, Fort Collins, Colo.

He said the slowdown--a response to shorter days--is a way for many plants to conserve energy or food reserves so they can survive the winter. He found that Windsor continues to grow through early September--and still has enough reserve energy for winter survival. Other cicer milkvetch varieties slow growth in early August.

Townsend and colleagues developed Windsor and released it in cooperation with the Colorado and Wyoming agricultural experiment stations. "Cicer is an ideal candidate for long-term pastures and hay meadows in a sustainable agricultural system," he said. Like alfalfa, cicer milkvetch makes its own nitrogen fertilizer with help from bacteria living on the roots.

He said Windsor probably is adapted in the same areas where Monarch now thrives. They include the central and northern Great Plains and adjacent Rocky Mountain areas that receive 16 inches or more of annual precipitation. Other adapted areas are irrigated meadows in the semi-arid West and upper Midwest.

Scientifically known as *Astragalus cicer*, cicer milkvetch is a highly nutritious forage well suited for livestock grazing and hay production. Townsend said cicer milkvetch should be seeded along with a perennial, cool-season grass that begins growth early in spring.

"Under favorable conditions, cicer milkvetch spreads by underground stems called rhizomes, so relatively poor initial stands are improved over time. There are productive stands in western Canada that are more than 40 years old," said Townsend.

Windsor should have about the same resistance to insects and diseases as Monarch, he added. Unlike alfalfa, cicer milkvetch doesn't cause bloat in grazing animals, he noted.

In the spring of 1995, growers will be able to purchase Windsor seed from Peterson Seed Company, Inc., P.O. Box 346, Savage, Minn. The company has an exclusive licensing agreement with the federal government to produce and market the seed. Researchers can obtain seed from Townsend for experimental purposes.

Townsend said cicer milkvetch seed must be adequately scarified to insure germination and must be inoculated with the proper bacteria before seeding.

Cicer milkvetch was grown experimentally in California in the mid-1920's. ARS studies at Fort Collins began in 1968, and Monarch was released in 1980. Windsor's parentage traces to 15 plants selected from Monarch.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For more information, contact Charley E. Townsend, plant geneticist, Crops Research Laboratory, Agricultural Research Service, USDA, 1701 Center Ave., Fort Collins, Colo. 80526. Telephone: (303) 498-4231.



Release No. 0244.94
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ESPY ANNOUNCES FINAL RULE ON SAFE COOKING/HANDLING LABELS FOR MEAT AND POULTRY

WASHINGTON, March 23 -- Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy today announced a final rule mandating safe cooking and handling labels for all not-ready-to-eat meat and poultry products.

The final rule, which was sent to the Federal Register today, will mandate that all raw or partially cooked ground meat and poultry must have the label in 60 days of publication of the rule, and all other not-ready-to-eat meat and poultry products must have the label by July 6.

"The safe cooking and handling labels will help provide essential health and safety information to consumers," said Espy who announced his support for mandating labels when he came to office last year. "Hopefully, the 20 years of debate regarding this simple but vital label is over.

"I applaud those who are voluntarily using this label. They recognize its importance and what it can do to help and educate consumers."

The labels were to be mandated nationwide on Oct. 15, 1993, but a motion from four industry groups for an injunction was granted on Oct. 14 by a U.S. district judge in Austin, Texas. The judge stated that there was no cause for an expedited rule-making process since E.coli O157:H7 outbreaks are isolated and separate. The judge stated that he believed the outbreaks of food poisoning attributed to E. coli O157:H7 occurred primarily in fast food chains and were isolated geographically.

The USDA had argued that illnesses and deaths attributed to E. coli O157:H7, as well as other pathogens such as salmonella, have occurred all across the nation and have not been limited to fast food chains.

The plaintiffs in the case were the National American Wholesale Grocers' Association/International Foodservice Distributors Association, the National Grocers Association and the Texas Food Industry Association.

The message on the label announced today is similar to the proposal by the secretary last year and opposed in the lawsuit.

The label notes that some food products may contain bacteria that can cause illness if mishandled or cooked improperly. The label further notes that raw meat and poultry should be: refrigerated or frozen and thawed in a refrigerator or microwave; kept separate from other foods and working surfaces while utensils should be washed after touching raw meats; cooked thoroughly; and refrigerated immediately or discarded.

"As we move our meat and poultry inspection systems to science-based systems and as we learn how to better detect harmful bacteria in the meat and poultry supply, we must keep the consumer aware about safe cooking and handling procedures," said Espy. "I want to emphasize, however, that this label does not affect our continuing responsibility to improve the meat and poultry inspection systems."

The message on the label was also the theme of a radio public service announcement produced by USDA featuring the parents of a child who had died due to E. coli O157:H7 last year in Washington State. The public service announcement, one part of an extensive public education campaign, was sent to 1,000 radio stations around the nation.

In addition to safe cooking and handling labels, after July 6, USDA will require nutrition labeling on processed meat and poultry products such as chicken franks and corned beef. Non-meat and poultry products regulated by the Food and Drug Administration must have nutrition labels after May 8 to comply with the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act.

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NOTE TO EDITORS/BROADCASTERS: After 7 a.m. EST, Thursday, March 24, PressLink subscribers/members may access the Safe Handling Label by opening the USDA folder in the US Government box.

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Release No. 0245.94
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USDA TO CONTINUE VOMITOXIN TESTING ON A PERMANENT BASIS

WASHINGTON, March 23 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Federal Grain Inspection Service announced today that it will continue vomitoxin testing of grain on a permanent basis. FGIS has been providing vomitoxin testing of grain, upon request, on a fee basis, as an official service since September 1993.

Vomitoxin testing on a permanent basis becomes effective April 23 at all official service points in the grain inspection and weighing system nationwide.

According to FGIS Acting Administrator David Shipman, the agency began offering the service under the authority of an interim rule, published in the Federal Register last September, to respond to the widespread occurrence of scab damage in last year's wheat crop and to the market's need for rapid, onsite testing capabilities.

Vomitoxin testing on a permanent basis is scheduled to be published as a final rule in the March 24 Federal Register.



Release No. 0248.94
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EXPERIMENTAL KENAF SHRUGS OFF ROOT PESTS

WASHINGTON, March 24--An experimental strain of kenaf, a fiber-producing plant, tolerates root-feeding nematodes and can yield three times as much fiber as standard kenaf varieties, a U.S. Department of Agriculture researcher said.

"We only recently identified the nematode tolerance in this kenaf strain, called SF459," said plant geneticist Charles Cook with the Agricultural Research Service. "It overcomes a serious hurdle to growing this fiber crop, which can be a renewable resource for many uses and has an ideal role in sustainable agriculture."

Cook said U.S. kenaf could provide substitutes to costlier, less environmentally friendly ways to make many farm, consumer and industrial products. These include packing material, matting, textiles, oil- and chemical-spill cleanup products, livestock bedding and an assortment of recyclable--or recycled--paper products from newsprint to high-quality paper. Plus, leafy kenaf foliage can be a high-protein hay for livestock.

Kenaf plants grow up to 15 feet tall. Lightweight fiber from the stalk's bark and core has long been used to make paper, rope and other fiber goods in Asia. China has 600,000 acres, dwarfing the 4,000 acres in this country, said Cook, with ARS' Subtropical Agricultural Research Laboratory in Weslaco, Texas.

"Root-knot nematodes are kenaf's major pest problem in the United States," he said. "Chemical controls are not economically feasible or environmentally desirable."

But in three years of tests in nematode-infested fields, the SF459 strain averaged 8,450 pounds of fiber per acre. A standard variety, Everglades 71, yielded 2,800 pounds.

Cook said root-knot nematodes feed and reproduce readily on SF459 plants, and isn't sure why its yields hold up. "The problem isn't only the nematodes' feeding," he explained. "They open up the roots as invasion routes for disease-causing fungi. I think SF459 has some resistance to these fungi. That would explain why its yields are high despite extremely high numbers of root-knot nematodes."

Within a year, Cook may be ready to release a commercial variety of nematode-tolerant kenaf in cooperation with Rio Farms, Inc., a nonprofit research institute in Monte Alto, Texas.

A kenaf producer in California, Agro-Fibers, Inc., already is commercially growing the experimental line of kenaf, based on results of a joint demonstration test with Cook.

In studies since 1989 to determine reliable growing methods, Cook has worked with Agro-Fibers and the other three major kenaf growers and processors, whose crop is finding its way into markets.

* Agro-Fibers, Corcoran, Calif., began nationally marketing kenaf mats impregnated with grass seed in 1992. The mats are being used in southern California to control erosion and reseed areas burned by the October 1993 fires. This spring, "Lawn Seed Mats" will be marketed, as well as mats with wildflower, vegetable, herb and spice seeds, said company president Gordon Fisher.

* "K-Mix" is a potting mix made of peat and of kenaf fiber grown and separated by Kenaf International, Ltd., McAllen, Texas. K-Mix went on sale in the fall of 1993. Also on the market, said company president Charles Taylor, are specialty paper, animal bedding and litter, janitorial sweeping compound and other products.

* Mississippi Delta Fiber Cooperative, Charleston, Miss., separates and markets kenaf core fiber as bedding material for horses, chickens and other animals. Ernest Brasher, co-op manager, said the fiber also is sold to companies that make paper, erosion-control and grass-seed mats and oil-absorbent products.

* Natural Fibers of Louisiana, Inc., Jeanerette, La., produces kenaf fiber made into several products including high-grade paper and patented oil-spill cleanup products, said president Harold Willett. He noted that nematodes have not been a problem for local kenaf farmers, who plant it on land that would otherwise be idle between sugarcane production cycles.

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Release No. 0249.94

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USDA TO HOLD REFERENDUM ON MERGING THREE TOBACCO MARKETS IN NORTH CAROLINA

WASHINGTON, March 24 --The U.S. Department of Agriculture will hold a mail referendum April 4 through April 8 to determine grower support for merging the Windsor, Williamston and Robersonville, N.C., tobacco markets into a single market.

Lon Hatamiya, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said the referendum follows earlier USDA approval of a proposal by local warehouse operators to merge the markets.

AMS heard testimony on that proposal at a public hearing in Williamston last November.

Two-thirds of the growers voting in the referendum must approve the proposal in order for the merger to become effective. To be eligible to vote, a grower must have sold tobacco at either of the three markets last year, Hatamiya said.

The Tobacco Inspection Act, which authorizes USDA's regulation of tobacco auction markets, stipulates conditions for the vote. The act also requires inspection of tobacco auctioned at USDA-regulated markets. Tobacco delivered to USDA-regulated markets for sale is eligible for USDA price support.

Neither tobacco price supports nor USDA's inspection activities would be affected by the merger.

USDA is distributing mail ballots to those growers verified as having sold tobacco at the Windsor, Williamston and Robersonville markets in 1993. Growers eligible to vote who have not received ballots by April 4 should contact Larry L. Crabtree, deputy director, Tobacco Division, Rm. 502-Annex, P.O. Box 96456, AMS, USDA, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456; tel. (202) 205-0567.

Notices and details about the referendum are scheduled to be published in the March 25 Federal Register.

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USDA INCREASES FmHA LOAN SPECIALISTS IN FLOOD STATES

WASHINGTON, March 24 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) is sending about 100 additional loan specialists to flood states in the Midwest to help process applications for emergency farm loans, an effort that will assist producers and help ensure the proper distribution of FmHA loans, FmHA Administrator Michael V. Dunn said today.

"Ten teams of volunteers from FmHA offices in other states have just arrived in Iowa to work in various locations across the state that suffered from last summer's floods," Dunn said. "The next few weeks will be critical in terms of financing this year's crop production."

"This is part of the commitment made months ago -- to do everything humanly possible to overcome the impact of the flooding on the farm community."

FmHA is organizing a total of 19 teams to help process the loans. Many are already at work or scheduled to arrive soon in Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota and Missouri.

Each team is prepared to stay 4 to 6 weeks depending on the need. The members are equipped with laptop computers and special software designed to help reach decisions on whether a farmer qualifies for a loan and for what amount in about 20 minutes. This stage of the paperwork normally takes about 2 hours.

"Specialists on the teams will be able -- and they are prepared -- to sit down at the farmer's kitchen table and work up a loan," Dunn said.

FmHA offices in Iowa received more than 1,600 applications in the last week for the emergency loans, which are designed to help farmers overcome part of their actual losses.

Applications are expected to increase in other states as the deadline for applying for the loans approaches. Farmers have eight months after a disaster designation to apply for the loans.



Release No. 0253.94
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USDA SCHEDULES STUDY OF FIELD OFFICES OF THE FUTURE

WASHINGTON, March 25--The U.S. Department of Agriculture will examine customer expectations of its "field offices of the future" through a focus group study in eight states during the next three weeks.

USDA Assistant Secretary for Administration Wardell Townsend said that the Department's "info share program" will use focus groups to learn customer expectations of new technologies and information systems.

"Information gathered during the focus group study will be used to identify ways of providing better customer service and determining technology requirements for USDA's field offices of the future," Townsend said.

The focus group study will take place March 28 through April 15 in nine counties. It will include a diverse demographic set of customers who require a variety of services. The counties are: Fresno County, Calif.; Lee County, Iowa; Logan County, Ky.; Hinds County, Miss.; Robeson County, N.C.; Umatillo County, Ore.; Hale County and Hedalgo County, Tex.; and Franklin County, Vt.

Four focus groups will be formed at each location and will represent current USDA customers, potential USDA customers, agriculture support groups and front-line USDA employees. USDA facilitators will lead the groups, conduct follow-up interviews and write the final report.

Anyone with suggestions or comments on this study is invited to send them to Paul Aydelott, Field Office of the Future Study Leader, USDA Info Share Program, at (303) 282-1445.

Release No. 0255.94
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PRODUCERS VOTE TO DISCONTINUE WASHINGTON PEACH MARKETING ORDER

WASHINGTON, March 25 -- Washington peach producers have failed to approve continuation of their federal marketing order, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced today.

Discontinuation of the marketing order is the result of a referendum held Nov. 13 - Dec. 10, 1993.

Lon Hatamiya, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said a continuance referendum requires approval of at least two-thirds of those voting, or required approval of those producing two-thirds or more of the peaches represented by the referendum.

Only 14 percent of the valid voters voted in favor of continuation, with that 14 percent representing 1.5 percent of the volume of peaches grown by those voters.

"Clearly, the result of the referendum demonstrates a lack of producer support for the program," Hatamiya said.

The Agricultural Marketing Agreement Act of 1937 authorizes federal marketing orders and requires that USDA notify Congress of its intention to terminate an order, with termination effective no earlier than 60 days afterward. Congress has been notified of USDA's intent to terminate the order.

Formal notice of termination of the order will appear in a future issue of the Federal Register.



Release No. 0256.94
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USDA REOPENS COMMENT PERIOD ON RULES IMPORT EXEMPTIONS

WASHINGTON, March 25 -- The U.S. Department of Agriculture has reopened the comment period on two rules establishing exemptions from Section 8e import regulations on certain commodities.

Lon Hatamiya, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service, said the period was being reopened because USDA has received requests for a longer comment period to address the safeguard provisions of the regulations.

Section 8e requires that whenever federal marketing orders for certain fruits, vegetables and specialty crops have grade, size, quality or maturity regulations, the same or comparable regulations must be issued on imports of those commodities.

These two rules added exemptions from grade, size, quality and maturity requirements for fruit, vegetable and specialty crops imported for processing and other specified outlets. The rules also implemented safeguard provisions to assure that such imports are used in specified outlets such as processing, livestock feed and charitable donations.

The period for comment has been extended to April 11, 1994.

Written comments should be sent, in triplicate, to the Docket Clerk, Marketing Order Administration Branch, F&V, AMS, USDA, Room 2523-S, P.O. Box 96456, Washington, D.C. 20090-6456. Comments sent by FAX should be sent to (202) 720-5698. All comments should reference the docket numbers and the March 11 issue of the Federal Register (page number 48 FR 11529), in which the reopening rule appears.

For more information, contact Jerry Brown at (202) 720-4607.

Release No. 0257.94
Bruce Merkle (202) 720-8206

1994-CROP WHEAT, BARLEY, OATS AND RYE COUNTY LOAN AND PURCHASE RATES

WASHINGTON, March 25--The U.S. Department of Agriculture today announced county loan and purchase rates for the 1994 crops of wheat, barley, oats and rye.

The 1994-crop county price support rates were determined in accordance with the Agricultural Act of 1949 and reflect changes in the national average price support rates. Some county rates were adjusted to reflect location and transportation costs. These adjustments were limited to a three percent change in addition to the change in the national average price support rate from the 1993 crop.

Copies of the rate schedules are available from: Thomas Fink, Cotton, Grain and Rice Price Support Division, USDA/ASCS, P.O. Box 2415, Washington, D.C. 20013. (202) 720-8701.



Release No. 0258.94
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USDA ANNOUNCES PARTICIPANTS FOR HACCP ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION ON MARCH 30-31

WASHINGTON, March 25--The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced the names of individuals selected to participate in a round-table meeting scheduled for March 30-31 at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 400 New Jersey Avenue, NW. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss plans to make the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) system mandatory in all federally inspected meat and poultry plants.

"We appreciate the willingness of our participants to share their individual and collective wisdom regarding HACCP," said Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy. "It will be extremely helpful as USDA drafts its proposed rule."

Participants in the HACCP round table include the following:

SCIENTISTS AND PROFESSIONAL SCIENTIFIC ORGANIZATIONS

Dane Bernard, National Food Processors Association
John Troller, American Society for Microbiology
Richard H. Forsythe, University of Arkansas
James Marsden, American Meat Institute
Michael Doyle, University of Georgia

CONSUMERS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

Carol Tucker Foreman, Safe Food Coalition
Caroline DeWaal, Public Voice for Food and Health Policy
Gerald F. Kuester, Safe Tables Our Priority
Karin L. Bolte, National Consumers League
Thomas Devine, Government Accountability Project

MEAT & POULTRY INDUSTRY GROUPS AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

Kenneth May, National Broiler Council
Tim Brown, Kroger Company
Gary Kushner, Hogan & Hartson
Bruce Tompkin, Armour Swift-Eckrich
Bernard Hansen, Flint Hills Foods

PRODUCERS AND FARMERS

Beth Lautner, National Pork Producers Council
Robert A. Smith, Oklahoma State University
Rod Bowling, National Cattlemen's Association
Michael Robach, Wayne Poultry

FSIS EMPLOYEES AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES

Edward Menning, National Association of Federal Veterinarians
Arthur Hughes, National Joint Council
Dennis Reisen, Assoc. of Technical and Supervisory Professionals

FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Martha R. Roberts, Florida Department of Agriculture
Mike Windham, National Association of State Departments of Agriculture
Michael Mamminga, National Association of State Meat & Food Inspection Directors

PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS

Pamela V. Fernandez, American Public Health Association
George Dimmick, Indiana State Department of Health

OTHER PARTICIPANTS

Mark G. Manis, Food Safety and Inspection Service, USDA
George Bancroft, Bancroft Farms
Edna Carpenter, Western Resource Council
LeRoy Russ, Carl Karcher Enterprise
Lonnie J. King, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, USDA
Fred R. Shank, Food and Drug Administration

The individuals representing the seven constituent categories were selected from a group of 187 possible participants. Persons in each constituent group category voted for who would represent that constituency, as specified in the Jan. 11 Federal Register notice about the round table.

Round-table participants were selected under a process announced Jan. 13 (USDA press release No. 0039.94) and include public health officials and representatives from the meat and poultry industry, consumer groups, scientists and professional scientific organizations, producer and farmer groups, USDA and other federal, state and local employees.

"We have chosen this forum because it will allow open and frank discussion of all issues relative to a HACCP system," Espy said. "HACCP is universally known as a process control system that can improve food safety systems. The round table will help us review all aspects concerning the use of this system in federally inspected meat and poultry plants."

The round table is open to the public and interested persons are encouraged to attend.

An announcement of this meeting was published in the March 24 Federal Register.

Other initiatives by Espy to improve the meat and poultry inspection system have included mandatory safe cooking and handling labels for all raw or partially cooked meat and poultry products, hiring additional inspectors and accelerating research on microbial testing.



Program Announcements-

Release No. 0242.94

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USDA ANNOUNCES PREVAILING WORLD MARKET RICE PRICES, MARKETING CERTIFICATE RATES

WASHINGTON, March 22--Under Secretary of Agriculture Eugene Moos today announced the prevailing world market prices of milled rice, loan rate basis, as follows:

--long grain whole kernels:	11.42 cents per pound
--medium grain whole kernels:	11.53 cents per pound
--short grain whole kernels:	11.38 cents per pound
--broken kernels:	5.71 cents per pound

Based upon these milled rice world market prices, loan deficiency payment rates, gains from repaying price support loans at the world market price, and marketing certificate rates are zero.

The prices announced are effective today at 3 p.m. EST. The next scheduled price announcement will be made March 29, at 3 p.m. EST.

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Release No. 0250.94

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USDA ANNOUNCES PREVAILING WORLD MARKET PRICE AND USER MARKETING CERTIFICATE PAYMENT RATE FOR UPLAND COTTON

WASHINGTON, March 24--Grant Buntrock, executive vice president of USDA's Commodity Credit Corporation, today announced the prevailing world market price, adjusted to U.S. quality and location (adjusted world price or AWP), for Strict Low Middling (SLM) 1-1/16 inch (leaf grade 4, micronaire 3.5-3.6 and 4.3-4.9, strength 24-25 grams per tex) upland cotton (base quality), and the coarse count adjustment (CCA) in effect from 5:00 p.m. today through 3:59 p.m. Thursday, March 31. The user marketing certificate payment rate announced today is in effect from 12:01 a.m. Friday, March 25 through midnight Thursday, March 31.

The Agricultural Act of 1949, as amended, provides that the AWP may be further adjusted if: (a) the AWP is less than 115 percent of the current crop year loan rate for base quality upland cotton, and (b) the Friday through Thursday average price quotation for the lowest-priced U.S. growth as quoted for Middling (M) 1-3/32 inch cotton, C.I.F. northern Europe (USNE price) exceeds the Northern Europe (NE) price. Because this week's calculated AWP is equal to 129.2 percent of the 1993 upland cotton base quality loan rate, a further adjustment cannot be made.

This week's AWP and coarse count adjustment are determined as follows:

Adjusted World Price

NE Price	81.35
Adjustments:	
Avg. U.S. spot market location	11.91
SLM 1-1/16 inch cotton	1.50
Avg. U.S. location	0.31
Sum of Adjustments	- 13.72
ADJUSTED WORLD PRICE	67.63 cents/lb.

Coarse Count Adjustment

NE Price	81.35
NE Coarse Count Price	- 78.27
	3.08
Adjustment to SLM 1-1/32 inch cotton	- 3.20
	- 0.12
COARSE COUNT ADJUSTMENT	0 cents/lb.

Because the AWP is above 52.35 cents per pound--the base quality loan rate for both the 1992 and 1993 marketing years--the loan repayment rate during this period is equal to the loan rate, adjusted for the specific quality and location plus applicable interest and storage charges. The AWP will continue to be used to determine the value of upland cotton that is obtained in exchange for commodity certificates.

Because the AWP is above the 1993-crop loan rate, loan deficiency payments are not available during this period.

The USNE price has not exceeded the NE price by more than 1.25 cents per pound for four consecutive weeks, nor have all of the previous four AWP's been less than 130 percent of the 1993 crop year base quality loan rate. As a result, the user marketing certificate payment rate is zero. Relevant data are summarized below:

Week	For the Friday through Thursday Period Ending	AWP (Announced) As Percent of Loan Rate	USNE Price	NE Price cents/lb	User Marketing Certificate Payment Rate
1	Mar. 3, 1994	131.2	84.75	82.42	0
2	Mar. 10, 1994	130.1	83.45	81.84	0
3	Mar. 17, 1994	129.3	83.00	81.43	0
4	Mar. 24, 1994	129.2	82.30	81.35	0

Next week's AWP, CCA and user marketing certificate payment rate will be announced on Thursday, March 31, at 5 p.m.

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CORRECTION-

Release No. 0239.94
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USDA SEEKS COMMENTS ON PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO MIDDLE ATLANTIC FEDERAL MILK MARKETING ORDER

WASHINGTON, March 22 -- In U.S. Department of Agriculture press release No. 0191.94 dated March 7, the date of a hearing on proposals to amend the Middle Atlantic federal milk marketing order was stated inadvertently as May 2.

The correct date for the hearing is May 3, as it appeared in the March 4 Federal Register.

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